

## **The Olympian**

### **Continue To Wage War Against Meth**

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When Rep. Brian Baird first went to Congress and started pushing for money and programs to fight methamphetamine addiction, his legislative colleagues looked at him askance and asked, "What's meth?"

Today, as a leader of Congress' 100-member meth caucus, when the Olympia congressman approaches his colleagues for help sponsoring an amendment, they say, "If it's meth, I'm on it."

The turnaround, unfortunately, signals the spread of meth addiction across the country and the mounting effort to curb the spread of meth addiction.

The public should support every effort to limit the availability of meth and ensure that those addicted to its lure have access to treatment programs.

Congress and state lawmakers are scrambling to curb the supply of meth-making drugs, increase funding for treatment providers and give law enforcement officers the tools they need to root out meth labs and send the manufacturers to jail.

Again, those efforts merit public support.

### **The scourge of addiction**

As a clinical psychologist, Baird saw a lot of individuals addicted to meth -- a stimulant cooked from various chemicals. The chemicals are corrosive, carcinogenic and flammable, and they produce toxic gases.

"Most of them say the same thing, that from their very first hit their life changed and it's been a downhill slide ever since," Baird said.

While Baird has been focusing on meth for five years, the so-called "tipping point" in Congress came this summer during debate on an appropriations bill.

Baird successfully attached an amendment to the bill to add \$20 million to combat meth nationally.

When congressional leaders saw the strength of the bipartisan vote on Baird's amendment, they added another \$34 million.

"People finally get it," Baird said.

He expects a vote -- perhaps as early as this week -- on a bill that determines how much of Sudafed and other drugs used to manufacture meth can be sold over the counter. The

bill also will track shipments of precursor drugs coming to the United States from Mexico, India, China and other countries.

Baird said the number of local meth lab busts are down but the rate of usage, the number of people seeking treatment and the amount of meth-related crime have stayed constant. That means the drug cartels in Mexico and elsewhere are having more success getting their illegal drugs into the hands of U.S. users, he said. Thus the international effort to bust "super labs" and drug shipments.

### **Statewide efforts**

On the local front, the state Legislature earlier this year passed a bill making it more difficult for consumers to get Sudafed and other ingredients used to manufacture meth.

Attorney General Rob McKenna said the state can and must do more. Earlier this year, he appointed a 28-member statewide meth task force that recently returned with a series of recommendations:

**Create** a crime, separate from manufacturing, for possession of large quantities of precursor chemicals used in the manufacturing process.

**Seek** parity between meth penalty laws in Washington and those in neighboring Oregon and Idaho so that meth traffickers and cooks aren't moving back and forth across state lines to avoid stricter sanctions.

**Reduce** the time off for good behavior for methamphetamine offenders from 50 percent to 33 percent.

**Support** adults who are victims of drug manufacturing in their homes, especially elderly adults who are innocent victims.

**Push** for secure funding for state and local health departments to ensure meth labs are cleaned up.

"This is not a quick fix," McKenna said. "These are longer-term approaches. This problem didn't pop up overnight, so it's going to require a sustained effort to beat it."

Clearly, elected officials in Washington state "get it."

They understand the dangers of methamphetamine and are working diligently to reduce the supply of the highly addictive drug.

The public must support their efforts.